

# CONCENTRATED NEW · ENGLAND

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· Kenneth L. Roberts ·







CONCENTRATED NEW ENGLAND





# Concentrated New England

A SKETCH OF CALVIN COOLIDGE

By

KENNETH L. ROBERTS

*Author of*

WHY EUROPE LEAVES HOME, SUN HUNTING.  
BLACK MAGIC



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## I

ONE of the easiest tasks in these United States, aside from such notoriously easy matters as rolling off a log or getting one's self summoned before a Senatorial Investigating Committee, is the weaving of a false character around any little-known man in public life or the setting up of a myth concerning him from which he will be unable to escape so long as there remains in existence two persons capable of exchanging rumors over a daily dish of orange pekoe.

In past years there have been set up many political myths which have been sufficiently erroneous and misleading to cause the Old Man of the Mountains or the Great Stone Face to burst into peals of merry laughter; but of all these many myths, the most persistent and firmly fixed

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myth is the great Calvin Coolidge Myth, which holds that the thirtieth president of the United States only breaks his silences on Tuesdays, Fridays and Sundays, and then only for the purpose of asking some one to pass the salt.

This myth has sunk so deep into the consciousness of the American people that it is highly probable that any man who has just sat for two hours in private conversation with him and has spent the entire time in a fruitless effort to get in a word edgewise would go back to his home town and tell five or nine stories in quick succession purporting to show that Calvin Coolidge was about as garrulous as an empty conch-shell—which, when held close to the ear, emits a distant and indistinct murmur for some people, and no sound whatever for other people.

Thus there has sprung up in some sections of the country the belief that Calvin Coolidge devotes most of his time to remaining silent, and that he works so hard to be silent that he has neither the time nor the energy to do anything else.

Although this great Calvin Coolidge Myth is somewhat lacking in plot and love-interest, it is



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worthy to rank with Jack and the Bean Stalk and Goldilocks and the Three Bears, which have hitherto had almost no modern competitors in the myth line.

## II

IT IS generally believed by all scientific experts above the level of those who think the earth is flat and not over six thousand years old, that a man's antecedents have more than a little to do with his characteristics. If this is true, there are three things in the past of Calvin Coolidge and his forebears that may have had more or less of an influence on his present actions.

For one thing, he is the descendant of people who have lived for many generations among the hills in the vicinity of Plymouth, Vermont.

For a second thing, his grandfather was such an entertaining conversationalist that people used to drive from miles around every week and stay to dinner just to hear him talk; so that whenever two or three were gathered together in the vicinity of Plymouth, one of the number would inevitably say: "By gorrry, that was a good one that Coolidge got off a few nights back!" and the tale would then be repeated to the accompaniment of many a faint grin, which has been the unmis-

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takable sign of almost ungovernable mirth in several sections of New England for lo these many years.

For a third thing, Calvin Coolidge is the first president of the United States to have in his veins the blood of the original Americans—a fact which a regiment of biographers appear to have overlooked.

His great grandmother showed clear evidence of Indian descent; and though succeeding generations of Coolidges have hidden the Indian blood beneath a protective coloring of fair hair and freckles, the Indian blood, like the Star Spangled Banner, is still there.

It is possible to ascribe many Coolidge characteristics to the Indian blood; but before any person does any ascribing along this line, he ought to know a little something about Indian characteristics.

It is popularly supposed, for example, that the average Indian expresses delight, sorrow, anger, pain, resentment, distress, doubt and various other emotions by the one exclamation "Ugh!", that he seldom if ever elaborates on this remark, and that silence and paucity of expression are his most striking attributes.

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As a matter of fact, almost any Indian, when he knows and trusts the person to whom he is speaking, will ramble on at such length that those who are obliged to listen to him are frequently seized with an almost uncontrollable desire to strike him smartly over the head with a stockingful of iron-filings in order to silence him for a few hours.

Every Indian tribe has scores upon scores of interminable legends, such as the story of how the Doctor of the Earth, Juh-wert-a-blah-blah or something similar, with the assistance of Esky-no-go-blah-bull, the chicadee, took a bowl of water and made it hard and hung it up in the sky (Wup-mush-ga-ga), thus forming the sun (Sis-boom-bah).

These legends are preserved by handing them down by word of mouth from father to son and from mother to daughter; and there are so many of them, and all the Indians are so thoroughly conversant with them, that most Indians must spend a large part of their lives telling long and involved legends to their children, instead of remarking "Ugh!" to one another morosely.

Indians are not at all silent when they have occasion to talk and when they know to whom



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they are talking. They are very patient, however, and they are apt to be modest and reticent; and when there is need for them to take action against trespassers and encroachers, they wait carefully and patiently until the time is ripe, and then they frequently take quick, violent and direct action of the most unexpected nature.

### III

CALVIN COOLIDGE has some of these attributes, as have a great many New Englanders who have no Indian blood in their veins; but no man can say definitely whether he inherited them from his Indian ancestors or from his New England forebears.

In appearance, in speech and in outlook he is a concentrated essence of old bucolic New England—the New England of farms and small towns and nasal twangs and long hours of work and horsehair sofas and reticence and church bells and straight thinking.

Even to-day New England is peppered with men whose voices sound exactly like Calvin Coolidge's voice, whose opinions are freely expressed to their friends when they meet in the post-office or the grocery store, but whose conversation with strangers is terse and guarded.

There is a time-mellowed New England tale which purports to show the attitude of New Englanders toward persons unknown. According to the tale a young man who had gone away from a

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New England village with his family at an early age returned after an absence of many years for the purpose of measuring the family wood-lot. On his arrival he went to the post-office to make certain inquiries of the postmaster, and on emerging from the post-office he paused to pass the time of day with four or five old residents who were sitting on the post-office steps, apparently allowing their minds to turn over silently in neutral, as one might say.

"Looks a little like rain," he remarked by way of an opening wedge.

His words were greeted with a rich silence on the part of the old residents.

"I say," he repeated, after something of a wait, "it looks as though it might rain."

After another long and eloquent silence, one of the natives removed his pipe from his mouth, neatly deluged an adjacent fly, turned his head slowly, gazed blankly at the young man, and finally asked:

"What you say yuh name wuz?"

"Why," said the young man, "my name's Eldridge. My family used to live over at Baxter's Dam Corners. Looks a little like rain, doesn't it?"

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At this the silence again settled down over the post-office steps, but eventually the same inquisitive native once more turned his head and looked coldly at the stranger. "Any relation to Eben Eldridge?" he asked carelessly.

"Yes, indeed," said the young man. "Eben Eldridge was my uncle. We'll probably get a little rain, don't you think so?"

"Then your father wuz Herb Eldridge, wa'n't he?" asked the native.

"Yes; Herbert Eldridge was my father," the young man replied.

"Oh, that so!" said the native, deftly favoring another fly with a shower bath. "Eben Eldridge's nephew and Herb Eldridge's boy, hey? Hm! Well, well!"

He and his companions studied the toes of their shoes intently for a few moments, and finally the native looked up at the sky dubiously. "Well," he admitted with some reluctance, "it *may* rain."



## IV

IN A way, the president has this cautious New Englandish attitude. He is suspicious of people who obviously want to please him or who are not sincere. And when he requests any person to supply him with the facts on a certain case, and an attempt is made to temporize or withhold part of the facts from him because he may find them unpleasant, that person will find himself in an extremely embarrassing situation; for the president usually sees through such an attempt, and removes the hide from the temporizer in a few well-chosen, choppy, flat-toned words.

He is something of a hand at writing and something of a hand at politics. He is a glutton for work, and wades through more of it in a given time than any other president has ever waded through in the memory of any person now connected with the White House. But as a bandier of airy badinage and a tosser-off of social chatter, he is what is known in movie circles as a flop.

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Light dinner-table persiflage no more enters into his scheme of things than would a knowledge of skiing into the life of the Sultan of Sulu.

It is said in Washington—although, like many of the things that have been said in Washington recently, it isn't true—that when Mr. Coolidge was vice-president, he was seated beside a dashing and daring society pet who turned to him brightly and gurgled, "Oh, Mr. Vice-President! I have just bet a dollar with Mrs. Blimp that you would say more than ten words to me at dinner!" Mr. Coolidge according to the story looked at her calmly and said, "You lose."

It is this fact, coupled with his aversion to wasting time in talking to people who aren't worth talking to—bores, professional hand-shakers, congenital time-wasters and false-alarmists—that is probably responsible for the existence of the great number of stories which emphasize his cruel and unusual silences; which make him out a freak, a silent and mysterious Buddha or a bloodless recluse; which seem to show clearly that the body before which he ought to appear from time to time is not Congress but a lunacy commission.

## V

THOSE who have legitimate business with the president know that he can and does talk at some length on all sorts of subjects every day. Those who have sat with him in his book-walled study on the second floor of the White House after dinner at night—and somebody sits there with him almost every evening—know that when he isn't busy relighting the ten cent cigar to which he is addicted but which he apparently can not keep smoldering, he is usually studying the toes of his boots as they rest peacefully on the top of his desk and emitting useful, interesting and even amusing thoughts on such widely diversified topics as dogs, book publishing, autograph hunters, English poetry, the higher education in its relation to Henry Ford, walking as a health-giving exercise, social aspirants, methods of clearing muddled brains, states' rights and numerous other matters of greater and less importance.

Those who journey down the Potomac with him aboard the *Mayflower* on pleasant Sundays

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frequently find him a solicitous and attentive host, who from time to time drops into a chair beside an individual or a little knot of guests, and, after securing a light for his extinguished cigar, spills a few remarks on this, that or the other thing.

He is no cookie-pusher. Five o'clock tea spoils his dinner, and chatty conversational openings are not his forte; so he is very apt to make an observation on some concrete subject, such as "That's Rudolph Forster, one of my secretaries." Such a remark can not be generally regarded as a scintillating opportunity for a brilliant reply, and the recipient of it usually says "Oh, really!" or "Oh, is that so!" and then wracks his brain frantically for some further observation until the president gets up and moves on in search of another match for his cigar. Occasionally he takes a guest to the bridge and talks with him for fifteen or twenty minutes at a time.

Those newspaper correspondents who go to the White House on Tuesdays and Fridays for the bi-weekly conferences with the president—who, because of the rule that the president's remarks at these conferences shall not be quoted, is always referred to as "a White House spokesman" when



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his remarks are passed on to the public in newspaper despatches—usually hear plenty of talk from the president on the subjects which they submit to him in writing about ten minutes before the conference begins. He never has a sufficient amount of time to prepare answers to these questions; and yet he answers them—frequently at great length—in offhand remarks that sound as though he had carefully written them out after careful study of the subjects under discussion.

He is a good talker when he wants to be; and when he doesn't want to be, no political considerations can make him talk. For some people he is a genuine refrigerating plant. Delegations from this, that and the other place can walk in on Coolidge in silken hats and frock coats on a hot June noon, sweating all over and with nothing in particular to say to him; and in no time at all they will be on their way out with icicles forming on their brows and upper lips from the coolness of their reception.

In short, as has been said before, Calvin Coolidge is a living symbol of the New England of the old days, a fact which should always be borne in mind when he is under discussion or examination.

## VI

COOLIDGE is a difficult man from whom to extract a promise; but once he has made a promise to any one, he always keeps it.

He has an excellent sense of humor, and he constantly tosses dryly humorous sallies into his conversation. While he would never shine at turning out sustained and broadly humorous hits like *Getting Gertie's Garter* or *Twin Beds*, he can, for example, comment on the humorous aspects in the case of people whose only fame lies in their claim to have known him intimately during his early days, or on the startling discovery on the part of some enterprising journalist that he was not a member of Northampton's social élite.

He is a constant church-goer; he is thrifty; he is averse to show. One of the great howls among the politicians is that he doesn't like to dress the part of president. He won't wear a frock coat for votes any more than he will shake hands for votes.

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And he is a little odd, with his refusal to window-dress and smoke expensive cigars and play to the gallery and conform to the politicians' ideas. All New Englanders are a little odd. They take pride in it. Any New Englander will tell you that every one is a little odd—except you and himself.

Calvin Coolidge's New Englandism is not calculated to make the unreconstructed South or the radical element of the glorious West burst into wild huzzas; for if one cares to listen to the plaintive wails that emanate at regular intervals from the more flannel-mouthed brand of southern and western politicians in the United States Senate and House of Representatives, one soon gathers that the principal occupation of a large part of the low and unprincipled New England population consists of seizing and holding a preponderance of the important positions in the United States Government.

On the other hand, it should be noted in passing that not all of the glorious West seems to share the aversion to New England that is so frequently expressed in Congress by the western brothers; for the sovereign state of Nebraska, in the 1924 primaries voted staunchly for its ster-

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ling vote-getter, Senator George W. Norris, widely noted in senatorial circles for his radical tendencies, but cast an even larger vote for Calvin Coolidge, who belongs to the more cautious New England set that refuses to make as many promises as the western radicals, but that keeps its promises with greater frequency. This unexpected and shocking—to Senator Norris—occurrence must have some meaning for those who aren't content to get all their political judgments from the tea-leaves in the bottom of the cup.

## VII

CALVIN COOLIDGE is that peculiar and practically unknown paradox, a very good politician who is a very bad politician. He usually refuses to do, politically, what the politicians think that he ought to do, and he seems wholly lacking in the ability or the ambition to trade hand-shakes for votes.

He seems to be interested only in the right or wrong of big issues; and he never feels the necessity of making a decision because of the political effect that it will have on some political division of the country, which is extremely distressing to the old-line politicians.

The Coolidge political machine to all intents and purposes has always been a one-man machine, and the one man has been Coolidge.

Politicians from far and near came and breathed their time-tried counsels in his ear and twisted their perfectos nervously in their mouths, whereupon Coolidge applied another match to

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the charred end of his cigar, nodded thoughtfully and proceeded to do as he pleased—and the thing that he did was usually something that didn't please the politicians. Then the politicians would scream with horror, jump up and down with excitement and tell one another that everything was lost, after which Coolidge would carry the primaries in another state.

Or they would insist that something be done immediately if the president didn't want to lose the confidence of the country. He would hear them with all the impassivity of his Indian forebears, and wouldn't do it.

The politicians would toss up their hands weakly, and declare that they were through: that nothing could be done with that piece of Vermont limestone; that every one might as well quit. And in a week or two weeks or so, the president would suddenly do the thing that the politicians said there was no use in doing so late.

Immediately every one would spring to his feet with a shrill cheer and compliment the president for doing the thing at the exact psychological moment, and telegrams of congratulation would pour in from every part of the country.

Every one who has anything to do with him



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agrees that he has an uncanny gift for knowing the exact moment at which to do or say the proper thing; but not one of the genuine blown-in-the-bottle politicians ever stops trying to make him do things when they want him to do them, instead of letting him do them in his own way.

Coolidge hasn't even a decent Kitchen Cabinet, unless some one with an inflamed imagination cares to regard Frank Stearns as a kitchen cabinet, which he is not; and this, from a political standpoint, connotes a terrible state of affairs. It's a terrible thing—for politicians—when a president uses his own judgment instead of letting the gang in on the good things.

He is not at all popular with the old-line politicians, and hasn't been popular for some time. So far as they have been concerned, he hasn't been on the cards, as the saying goes. No particular secret has ever been made of the fact that the politicians intended to place him neatly on the greased skids, if he had remained in the vice-presidential chair, and slide him rapidly and quietly out of the picture at the Republican National Convention of 1924. Naturally the politicians can't quite reconcile themselves to seeing him occupy the entire foreground of the picture.

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Occasionally they think it's all an unpleasant dream from which they will shortly awake.

There is consequently some reason to believe that Mr. Coolidge's campaign for the presidency will be conducted along somewhat unexpected lines, and with a dearth of the old familiar political faces peering over the edge of the band wagon.

If he runs true to form, he will repair to the quiet upper reaches of the White House and ponder deeply over the exact meaning of such occurrences as, let us say, the Nebraska primary election, where more voters cast their ballots for him than they did for their own favorite son. He will interpret out of his own inner consciousness the meaning of those votes, and the things that the voters want him to do, even though their desires may be only partly formulated in their own minds; and he will have but little converse with politicians who seek to assist him in the interpreting.

If past history counts for anything, Coolidge's interpretation will probably be correct; and the interpretations of the old-line politicians would probably be incorrect. The old-line politician interprets according to his ideas of what he ought

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to let the people have, whereas Coolidge interprets according to his idea of what the people should rightly have.

As for the old-line politician who rushes to the front filled with a passionate and overwhelming desire to write into the Republican platform the customary rousing but moth-eaten cheers for the American eagle and the Old Flag, he is fairly certain to be handed his hat and asked, in the frosty nasal twang common to Plymouth, Vermont, and its purlieus, what's his hurry.

## VIII

CALVIN COOLIDGE is a modest man and a shy man. Probably the first and the most lasting impression that he makes on persons who are quick to sense the characteristics of any individual is an impression of pleasing modesty. Nor is there any false modesty about him. He does not hesitate to say, for example, that there has been nothing unusual or dramatic about any part of his career, or that he thinks he has never done anything extraordinary, or that he is not particularly brilliant.

But he is also quick to say that he thinks the people of the country, in general, like him; that they like him because he goes along like the ordinary run of folk; that they understand him more than they understand a brilliant man, because they say to themselves that he's one of their own sort.

This shyness and modesty is more than likely to make it somewhat difficult for the gentlemen who, when the presidential campaign waxes hot

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and begins to wither the leaves on the trees and cause the little birds to lie palpitating in their nests, advocate the blowing of the loudest bazoo obtainable and the noisest possible ringing of the welkin for publicity purposes.

There are, in Washington, large numbers of potential presidential candidates and persons in high positions who maintain expensive publicity agents to send out tons of press notices and laudatory articles whenever their employers rid themselves of a few well-chosen words on any subject ranging from the effect of string beans on the growth of children to the damning effect of a bootlegger's testimony on the future of a great political party.

If other people want to do such things, Coolidge hasn't the slightest objection; but he has never had any desire to do them himself, just as he seems to have had little desire to do the conventional political things in the conventional political ways. He knows that he does a lot of things every day that have good publicity value; but he makes no effort to get publicity on them—a fact which causes great anguish to his political friends. His attitude is that whatever publicity he receives is purely voluntary, that such public-

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ity is pretty substantial and very difficult to break down, and that it has an enduring quality that can't possibly be achieved by the reams and bales of publicity that are sent out by the more enterprising advertisers.

He will be forced by circumstances to use publicity representatives during his campaign for the presidency; but there will be violent and hair-raising brain-storms among the publicity men and the political friends, for he is going to keep right on doing as he pleases in his old familiar way. One of his high-minded publicity experts, for example, is going to come rushing into the president's office all aglow with some wonderful idea for publicity and place it proudly before the president; whereupon the president is going to stare at his desk with the pale and peaked look that is peculiar to him and say, in his best Plymouth, Vermont, manner: "No. Don't want an'thing to do with it." He won't bother to explain or elaborate on his decision, and the high-minded young publicity man will be very apt to walk right out past Pat McKenna and blow up with a loud annual report.

The president's manner of speech, incidentally, might almost be regarded as an example of the



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steadfastness that he evidences in so many things. Owing to the limits of the English language, there is no manner in which the peculiar flatness and at the same time sharpness of his speech can be reproduced. It is, however, characterized by the same general sort of accent that is used by the vaudeville farmer who twiddles his chin whiskers and says "How be ye, Si, gol durn it!"

The president, of course, commits none of the grammatical blunders that are affected by the stage farmer; but there are times in his private conversation when he is a bit careless with his *g's*. A cow, so far as he is concerned, is a caow. He doesn't go down east; he goes daown east. Usually the New England farm boy who goes to the city to live eventually loses a great deal of this twang. The president has lost very little of it, in spite of being mayor of Northampton and governor of Massachusetts and holding many other high positions; and he furthermore has never laid aside the friends that he made in the Vermont academy that he attended or in Amherst College.

## IX

THERE is always great grief in the vicinity of Coolidge when his friends and well-wishers begin to froth at the mouth over attacks that are frequently made on him, and urge him to train the presidential guns on his attackers and blow them out of the water. Here the president's friends find themselves caught up a blind alley, for he has the feeling that his attackers are following an old established political custom, and that they have a right to this custom. He has never cared to use this weapon himself; and attacks of this nature cause him little irritation because of his feeling that the position of president of the United States is above such attacks.

If, however, some over-enthusiastic congressman, let us say, should deliver an attack that would be an attack on the rights of the chief executive under the Constitution instead of a personal kick at Calvin Coolidge, it would probably prove to be a bird of another feather—of several other feathers, in fact—and the president would

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be quite likely to take his pen in hand and knock about six non-refillable holes in his attacker before he knew what had hit him.

Two good instances of this are his sharp messages to the Senate early in 1924, the first when the Senate attempted to insert its mischievous senatorial fingers into the president's Cabinet, and again when a Senate committee essayed to thrust its prying senatorial nose into the Treasury Department. In the first instance he told the Senate that the dismissal of an officer of the government is exclusively an executive function and that he regarded it as a vital principle of government; also that he did not propose to sacrifice any innocent man for his own welfare, or propose to retain in office any unfit man for his own welfare. This was equivalent to applying a rattan smartly to the senatorial fingers.

The second instance was also an attack on the rights of the chief executive, and he conveyed to the Senate the equivalent of a good spanking in the following words:

"The constitutional and legal rights of the Senate ought to be maintained at all times. Also the same must be said of the Executive Departments. But these rights ought not to be used as a

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subterfuge to cover unwarranted intrusion. It is the duty of the executive to resist such intrusion and to bring to the attention of the Senate its serious consequences. That I shall do in this instance.

“Under a procedure of this kind (the investigation of the Bureau of Internal Revenue by a Senatorial Investigating Committee) the constitutional guarantee against unwarranted search and seizure breaks down, the prohibition against what amounts to a government charge of criminal action without the formal presentment of a grand jury is evaded, the rules of evidence which have been adopted for the protection of the innocent are ignored, the Department becomes the victim of vague, unformulated and indefinite charges, and instead of a government of law we have a government of lawlessness. Against the continuation of such a condition I enter my solemn protest, and give notice that in my opinion the Departments ought not to be required to participate in it. If it is to continue, if the government is to be thrown into disorder by it, the responsibility for it must rest on those who are undertaking it. It is time that we returned to a government under and in accordance with the

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usual forms of the law of the land. The state of the Union requires the immediate adoption of such a course."

For days after the administering of the last spanking, the entire Senate, which is constantly on the qui vive for insults, was in an uproar over the president's sharp words. Many distinguished senators called Mr. Coolidge all the names that they could call him without having the *Congressional Record* barred from the mails; but owing to the fact that they were in somewhat the same position as a tramp who has been stopped by a policeman from setting fire to a farm-house, their cries of rage brought them little sympathy from the people.

## X

THE president is something of an expert at the business of taking his pen in hand; and he was so considered as far back as 1895, when he was a senior at Amherst College and the Sons of the American Revolution offered a one-hundred-fifty-dollar gold medal to the one man out of the senior classes of all American colleges and universities who should produce the best essay on the causes of the American Revolution. Young Mr. Coolidge took his pen in hand in competition with the best thought of the senior classes of all the ivy-clad institutions of advanced education, and when he laid it down again he had produced the essay that took the great gold medal—and this, considering the competition, was no slouch of an accomplishment.

Since that time Calvin Coolidge has written a large number of essays in the form of speeches, many of which have been brought out in book form; and they are well worth the study of the many people of prominence who, without know-



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ing anything at all about Coolidge except that he isn't particularly chatty, keep spreading the grossly inaccurate information that he spends so much of his time in keeping silent that he is shallow and superficial and weak and timid and indecisive and so on.

These good folk might take a few minutes on some rainy afternoon to ponder his message to Samuel Gompers during the Boston police strike in which he bluntly informed him that "there is no right to strike against the public safety by anybody, anywhere, any time."

The threatening letters which poured in on him for months after this—even after he had come to Washington as vice-president—were so violent that a uniformed policeman was supposed to accompany him whenever he walked out alone. Persons who mistake Coolidge's modesty and reticence for indecisiveness and timidity would also be apt to mistake the Washington Monument for a barber's pole.

There have been public men in America whose every written utterance was greeted with glad acclaim as being the last word in beautiful English. Every one knew that it was beautiful English, because sometimes it was so beautiful

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that there would be great difference of opinion as to its meaning.

There are not many fits thrown over Coolidge's beautiful English; partly because it is very simple, and the beauty of simple things is frequently overlooked; and partly because it can always be understood, which is sometimes an almost fatal flaw if the author wishes his work to be received with respectful outcry in the present advanced but befuddled era.

The following excerpts from recent speeches delivered by Calvin Coolidge are fair samples of his ability to make the English language do his pleasure, as well as of his outlook on life:

. . . . .

"We do not need more material development, we need more spiritual development. We do not need more intellectual power, we need more moral power. We do not need more knowledge, we need more character. We do not need more government, we need more culture. We do not need more law, we need more religion. We do not need more of the things that are seen, we need more of the things that are unseen."

. . . . .

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“The process of civilization consists of the discovery by men of the laws of the universe, and of living in harmony with those laws.”

• • • • •  
“There is danger of disappointment and disaster unless there be a wider comprehension of the limitations of the law. The attempts to regulate, control and prescribe all manner of conduct and social relations is very old. It was always the practise of primitive peoples. Such governments assumed jurisdiction over the action, property, life, and even religious convictions of their citizens down to the minutest detail. A large part of the history of free institutions is the history of the people struggling to emancipate themselves from all of this bondage.”

• • • • •  
“Without the presence of a great directing moral force, intelligence either will not be developed or, if it be developed, it will prove self-destructive. Education which is not based on religion and character is not education. It is a contradiction in terms to suppose that there can be any real intelligence which does not recognize the binding force of right, of justice, and of truth.”

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"The trial which the civilization of America is to meet does not lie in adversity. It lies in prosperity. It will not be in a lack of power, but in the purpose directing the use of great power. There is new danger in our very greatness."

. . . . .

"The age of science and commercialism is here. There is no sound reason for wishing it otherwise. The wise desire is not to destroy it, but to use it and direct it rather than to be used and directed by it, that it may be, as it should be, not the master but the servant, that the physical forces may not prevail over the moral forces, and that the rule of life may not be expediency but righteousness."

. . . . .

"There can be no permanent prosperity of any class or part. Such a condition can only be secured through a general and public prosperity. This means that to secure this end there must be a general distribution of the rewards of industry. Wherever this condition is maintained, there you have the foundation for an increasing production and a sound financial and economic condition."

. . . . .

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“Of course it would be folly to argue that the people can not make political mistakes. They can and do make grave mistakes. They know it, they pay the penalty, but compared with the mistakes which have been made by every kind of autocracy they are unimportant. Oftentimes the inconvenience and loss fall on the innocent. This is all a part of the price of freedom. Unless the people struggle to help themselves, no one else will or can help them. It is out of such struggle that there comes the strongest evidence of their true independence and nobility, and there is struck off a rough and incomplete economic justice, and there develops a strong and rugged national character. It represents a spirit for which there could be no substitute. It justifies the claim that they are worthy to be free.”

## XI

CALVIN COOLIDGE has frequently said that he is not a brilliant man; but it is probable that if there is any truth in the statement that genius is merely infinite capacity for taking pains, he is more of a genius than he realizes.

As a taker of pains, he easily deserves a place on the all-American painstaking team. He takes a good part of them in digging out the exact facts concerning matters that come before him for decision; and most of the rest of his pains are taken in the writing of his speeches and public documents. Most of his speeches and public documents are so simple and easy to read that they sound as though little work went into their composition; and occasionally, it is true, Coolidge writes a speech with no great amount of effort.

But usually the task of pursuing the reluctant ideas to their lair, marshalling his thoughts in proper alignment, and setting them all down on paper entails—just as it does for most authors—violent effort and extreme mental anguish. The



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ideas simply will not emerge from his head; and when this misfortune befalls Mr. Coolidge, as it does all writing folk, he adopts the method commonly adopted by writers and either walks them out of his system or talks them out.

When he is walking a speech out of his inner consciousness, he strides around and around his room if he is restricted to one room, or from one room to another and back again if he has more space at his disposal, with his head down, his eyes fixed on the floor and his feet kicking out ahead of him in a peculiar exaggerated scuffle. During his walking-out method he becomes so absorbed in his thoughts that he loses all sense of his surroundings. While trying to walk a speech into existence during his vice-presidential term, he scuffed his foot into the base of a floor-lamp with such whole-hearted vigor that he broke a toe.

When he is using the thinking method of working out a speech or arriving at a conclusion, he merely sits and thinks. At such times it pleases him to have the companionship of some safe and soothing personality at whom he can direct chance observations as they come into his head. His idea in this is probably that of the author who,

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when he reaches a difficult spot in his story, rushes to some one to whom he can tell the story. The mere vocalization of the difficult part frequently suggests to the author the proper solution of his difficulty.

This accounts for the presence in the White House of an intellectual shock absorber in the person of Frank Stearns, a fellow graduate of Amherst, whose chief rôle is that of safe and silent attendant at the president's frequent sessions of more or less silent thought.

Persons who have been called to sit in on these thought-fests are occasionally left in some doubt as to whether the president is thinking about something, whether he has forgotten his companion, or whether he has just plain gone to sleep.

Mr. Coolidge, however, seems to derive the necessary benefit from his brooding; for after many hours—and sometimes days—of it, he plunges into his speech or document or whatever it is, and it rolls out of him in such form that changes are rarely necessary.

He is no intellectual aristocrat in his mental functioning. He does not feel that he was born with a heaven-sent insight into everything; so he frequently spends weeks on end in questioning

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all sorts of people most carefully in regard to the facts in some case that he is considering—one question to-day and another to-morrow. At the end of two or three weeks or a month he rolls all his facts together in his mind, lets them settle, and almost invariably emerges with the correct solution.

He wants nothing from those whom he questions except the facts. The conclusions that are reached from these facts are reached entirely by Calvin Coolidge without outside assistance, and they are based entirely on the facts.

## XII

MANY presidents have been what is known as "reachable" in many matters; that is to say, they have had intimates and trusted assistants whose recommendations were frequently asked and frequently taken. Coolidge is wholly unreachable; and one of the few things that irritate him is the attempt on any one's part to use the influence of some one who has access to him in order to get him to do some particular thing.

Such an attempt, he feels, shows that somebody evidently considers him incapable of reacting properly to the facts. Having proved through long public service that he can be depended on to react honestly and correctly to facts, he is most unpleasantly affected by any intimation to the contrary. His disgust may only be shown by a slightly elevated eyebrow or by a slight lowering of the corners of his mouth, but it will nevertheless be enthusiastic and sincere.

One of his most important acts while he was governor of Massachusetts was the reorganiza-

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tion of the departments of the state, their reduction in number from something like one hundred eighteen to twenty, and the appointment of seventy new state officials. In this reorganization the Coolidge ax knew no friend; and he has said that it took more courage than the settling of the police strike. He had seventy appointments to make; and after conferring and consulting day and night as to whom the seventy should be, he locked himself in his office alone for about ten days in order to think the matter out.

His nearest friend had done some fluent guessing as to whom the seventy would be, and he was successful in guessing only three of them. None of the three was appointed to the position that the friend had guessed. Nobody "reached" him on any of the seventy. The only man who had a hand in the selecting of them was Calvin Coolidge; and his selections were of such quality that the governor who succeeded him reappointed every man.

### XIII

FRANK STEARNS, leading member of the not overly-large number of people who are justified in calling themselves friends of the president, is a wealthy Boston merchant and Amherst graduate who contracted a strong attachment for Mr. Coolidge when he was lieutenant-governor of Massachusetts. He grew to know him while he was interested in certain legislation favorable to Amherst; and as soon as he knew him, he became convinced that the greatest man in these broad United States was Calvin Coolidge. This conviction, incidentally, has been and still is held by a number of other old and new friends of Coolidge—friends who are looking for nothing whatever in return for their enthusiasm.

Stearns' method of showing the high esteem in which he held his new friend was to talk Coolidge morning, noon and night. He urged him to run for the governorship. Whenever there was a lull in the proceedings, the kindly voice of Frank Stearns could be heard putting in good words

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for Calvin Coolidge at the rate of about one hundred fifty words a minute. His persistence led many of his friends to think that he was suffering from a slight touch of the sun or something. When Coolidge became governor Stearns neither relaxed nor increased his efforts. He was seen frequently in the vicinity of the state house; and whenever he was seen he was making the welkin ring with his encomiums of Coolidge.

Coolidge, he said, would be president. Coolidge was the greatest American since Lincoln. Coolidge, Coolidge, Coolidge, Coolidge! He refused to allow private affairs to interfere with his new occupation; so he turned over the management of his large and profitable business to younger men in order to have more time in which to spread the glad tidings concerning Calvin Coolidge.

As the head of R. H. Stearns & Co., of Boston, which advertises heavily in the Boston newspapers, Frank Stearns' frequent remarks on the subject of Calvin Coolidge were not, to put it conservatively, entirely ignored by the press of Boston, which helped a little.

There was considerable hilarity in Boston over the Coolidge complex of plump, amiable, enthusi-



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astic Frank Stearns. Greatest American since Lincoln? Huh! Future president of the United States? Ha! Ha! Poor Frank had cracked, said the Bostonians. He would find himself in Danvers—Danvers being the seat of a large Massachusetts retreat for the mentally deranged—long before Coolidge ever reached the White House! This should be a lesson to every business man not to work so hard! And so on and so forth.

## XIV

PRESSED to define his relationship with the president, Stearns says that his personal relationship to him is that of a father to a son, and that his political relationship is that of a son to a father.

He sits in the lobby of the White House offices day after day, smiling amiably at those who come and go, handing out cigars, listening non-committally to those who have some real or fancied reason for seeing the president, and seizing every opportunity to let it be known in a way at which the most hard-boiled White House reporter can not take offense that Calvin Coolidge is the greatest American since Lincoln, and that he will be the next president of the United States.

His remarks nowadays don't provoke the same gusts of mirth that they did in Boston some time ago.

Comparatively recent history will show that the position of next friend to the president of the United States is one that frequently brings

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dire misfortune in its train—such misfortunes, for example, as unexpected bludgeonings from the hand of the loved one, or offensive enlargement of the head, or delusions of grandeur.

Among the list of presidential next friends, Frank Stearns so far appears to be the only one who has proved to be one hundred per cent. efficient; and both the steadfast character of Mr. Coolidge and the old-fashioned honesty of Mr. Stearns—who, for example, has always refused to profane the Sabbath by advertising the wares of his large and excellent Boston business house in the Sunday newspapers of that city—are good indications that Mr. Stearns has a fair chance of leading the Presidential Next Friend League for many years to come.

During the early days of the Coolidge régime, the Washington correspondents regarded Mr. Stearns' frequent visits to the White House with the closest interest, and a number of them were inclined to accord him the proud position of fixer of the administration—the gentleman through whom Coolidge could be reached.

The only flaw in their reasoning lay in the fact that a good fixer, in order to preserve his reputation with the cognoscenti, should at least

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have an ambition for the rôle, even though he fails to deliver the goods; and Mr. Stearns, instead of blushing modestly at the insinuations of the correspondents, rudely refused the crown and even showed signs of decided peevishness—the first he had ever publicly shown—when various gentlemen approached him with propositions in which he was to play the rôle of king pin of the Coolidge administration. Stearns says openly that he wouldn't dare to attempt to influence the president.

Even the conductors of the Washington sight-seeing buses have given up their plan to advertise Frank Stearns as the power behind the throne because of the solemnity, sincerity and convincingness with which he has set forth to every one that his rôle, if he has one, is merely to attend luncheons and dinners which the president attends, and sit close enough to him to bridge over the presidential silences with the social chit-chat and the airy nothings which are not a part of the president's cosmos, so to speak.

## XV

THERE has been more than a little talk of late of the terrific strain of the presidency; but the greatest amount of strain that can be observed around the White House nowadays is evinced by the tourists who line up to march through the president's office three or four times a week.

As a matter of fact there is only one real strain on a president of the United States, and that is the strain that may be imposed by his own ill health. President Coolidge is the healthiest president who has occupied the White House in many years. Not long ago there was a symposium by various White House doctors as to the methods used to keep various presidents physically fit. Some of the accounts were almost a column long. At the very end was an extremely brief statement from Mr. Coolidge's doctor, the general drift of which was that he kept Mr. Coolidge fit by leaving him alone.

Mr. Coolidge's one and only hobby, unless running for office can be regarded as his hobby, is

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the form of exercise familiarly known as a nice long walk. He believes that every one should walk more, and so preserve and improve his health. He furthermore doesn't care overmuch about walking alone, inasmuch as walking alone gives him a feeling to which he refers as "a sort of naked feeling." This naked feeling is really New England shyness.

Every morning at seven o'clock he walks for an hour in various parts of the city, accompanied by the ever-present secret service man. Occasionally, a friend accompanies him, but not often. For a time a certain senator affected athletic tastes and joined him in his morning walks. Unfortunately this senator, having failed to walk his candidate into a judgeship, went back to his morning slumbers. There is no such thing as walking into a job with Coolidge.

## XVI

AT NINE o'clock he goes to his office. After he has disposed of his personal mail the appointments begin and continue from a little before ten to a little before one—two minutes for this man, five minutes for another, fifteen for another and so on. On Tuesdays and Fridays he meets the newspaper men; and on other days the hand-shakers are poured into his office by one door and out by another—one of the greatest nuisances to which a president is subjected.

His secretary, Bascom Slemph, recently inaugurated the policy of having the day's grist of visitors walk past his desk and watch him at work instead of holding up proceedings while they clutched his hand for a moment—a change which, if permanent, will be a great relief to any president. President Harding was popularly supposed to take great pleasure in his daily hand-shaking seance; but those who were closest to him frequently saw him exhibit marked signs of annoyance when the hand-shaking hour fell due. President Harding's record for White House



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hand-shaking was two thousand seventy on one day in Easter week.

President Coolidge returns from lunch at two-thirty, and is allowed to devote as much as possible of the afternoon to going over his official mail. The White House staff says that his mail is fifty per cent. larger than that which any president has ever received. They are not quite sure how they ought to account for it. One of his secretaries thinks that Coolidge seems to act as the average citizen acts, whereas other presidents have frequently been represented in the daily press as constantly engaged in pursuits that are foreign to the great mass of people, and that the average citizen therefore feels freer to write to Mr. Coolidge than to any other president. At any rate, he gets a very large mail; and the average letter explains that the writer doesn't know the president and the president doesn't know the writer, and that the president probably won't see the letter anyway, but that the writer is a farmer—or a farmer's wife—and that he believes that the president is an honest, God-fearing man, and that he hopes he will be re-elected.

Specialists on various national matters give information to the president on certain afternoons,

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and Cabinet officers are frequently called in for talks, as are influential members of Congress.

Then there is the day's accumulation of dotted lines on which the president must sign—a task which proves more irritating to Mr. Coolidge than any that he is called on to perform. There are many requests for autographs on cards, album pages and photographs, and very many documents that could easily be signed on behalf of the president by some one else if it were not for the fact that the law specifically demands his signature.

The law, for example, requires that he must sign the appointment of every postmaster; the nomination of every office-holder confirmed by the Senate; the commission of every United States marshal; the commission of every collector of Internal Revenue or Customs; the commission of every appraiser of a port and of every surveyor of a port; the commissions of all United States attorneys, of all registrars of the Land Office and all notaries public in the District of Columbia; the commission of every army officer with the rank of general and every naval officer with and above the rank of captain; all withdrawals or restorations of public land—which are very nu-

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merous; all expenditures by United States marshals before their quarterly accounts are approved; all pardons and commutations of sentence; all court-martial proceedings; all letters of credence for all ministers, and the exequaturs of all foreign diplomatic and consular representatives; all consular commissions and all consular changes; the commissions of all secretaries of Embassy and Legation; all extradition papers; the authorization for the signing of a treaty and the ratification of all treaties; the credentials of all Public Health officers ordered abroad; every bill passed by Congress; and every deed and every will made by any Indian not a citizen of the United States—and most Indians are not citizens. To require a president of the United States to sign such a mass of material is, to put it mildly, nonsense.

It is interesting to note, as a sidelight on President Coolidge's shyness and reticence, that he does not have and has never had an autographed photograph of President Harding. Having been through the autograph requirements of the governorship of Massachusetts, he refused to burden President Harding's tasks by even one additional request.

## XVII

ALL of the White House staff agree that the president is a tireless and tremendous worker. His desk is always clean—a statement that could not be made of his predecessors. His secretaries frequently refer to him as a “human thinking-machine,”—which, incidentally, he is not.

There was unrest in the White House offices one hot Saturday afternoon in April; for the president had gone out, and the White House staff would have liked to do a little wandering on its own account. Unfortunately, nobody knew for certain whether or not the president intended to come back, and argument consequently ran high.

At length Pat McKenna, guardian of the outer door, went into the president's room and looked at all the clues in sight. Then he returned to his co-workers with the definite information that the president was coming back. They at once wanted to know how he knew. “Why,” said Pat, “there are two papers on his desk. Of course he'll come back.” And he did.

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Again, late in the afternoon, the president walks about the city, and at dinner there are nearly always guests. After dinner he goes to his study, usually with one or two guests, reads the newspaper clippings which are pasted on yellow sheets of paper by the White House staff, and talks—or listens—until bedtime.

These yellow sheets covered with newspaper clippings do not appeal to the president as the last word in information. He believes that every president ought to be allowed to employ a staff to prepare and place before him every morning a brief digest of the news of the world, together with an explanation of its meaning. This is done for the king of England; and as a result the king of England is the best informed executive in the world.

. . . . .

The person who comes in close contact with Calvin Coolidge must be a singularly insensitive person if he does not feel sure of his sincerity, his honesty, his modesty, his reliability, his determination to do what is right.

And it seems reasonably apparent that for any person who dislikes or is suspicious of simplicity, stability of character, loyalty, thrift, sound judg-

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ment based entirely on the evidence, and a desire to alleviate ills with remedies that will cure instead of new-fangled and half-tried nostrums, Calvin Coolidge must always be a disappointing president.

THE END











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